

**WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS COUNCIL  
FLATWOODS CONFERENCE CENTER  
JUNE 24, 2011  
MEETING MINUTES**

Meeting called to order by Chairman Epling, followed immediately by the Invocation, led by Ralph Stump and the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Patrick Farrell.

Chairman Epling reminded everyone that if they want to talk or make a comment, please let the person presenting the program finish and then the floor will be open for comments or any discussion. When you get up, please state your name for the record, so that we have it in our minutes.

Roll Call taken by Director Keith Gwinn and all nine Council Members were present.

Mr. Miles Epling, Mr. Patrick Farrell, Mr. Chester Fleming, Mr. William "Bill" Harris, Ms. Debra Tompkins, Mr. Cedric Greene, Mr. Randall Bare, Mr. Ralph Stump, and Mr. Robert Vass.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Since copies of minutes from last meeting were disbursed, the motion was made, seconded, and passed to suspend the reading of the minutes and to accept the minutes as presented in hard copy for February 11, 2011.

- **Medal of Honor Plaques at the Veterans Nursing Facility at Clarksburg:**

Dr. Kevin Crickard gave report: Have been working with artist on this project for last 9 -12 months.

We have been able to get the Medal of Honor displays up – Eight total displays. The artwork basically of each campaign shows the picture of the campaign, such as Civil War, Vietnam, etc. There is also a brief biography or write up of the Veteran of Honor or the Medal of Honor Recipients. Constituents at Memorial Day Celebration looked at the Medal of Honor displays and they weren't satisfied with the outcome of the artwork. I made the decision to go ahead and pay the artist because they met with the technical specifications of what we asked them to do. We are proceeding with a change order and looking at it again for possible tweaking with the art to make it look more presentable. They are up, but we are looking at making a few more minor changes.

Chairman Epling: Any Questions?

Woody Williams introduced himself and commented: We would like to see the same thing happen that has happened at the Nursing Home, happen at the Veterans Home and at other Veteran Centers within the State.

Dr. Crickard states that this is why it is critical that we get it exactly right this first time around even with additional changes, so that what we finally end up with makes everyone happy.

- **Chairman Epling requested Dr. Kevin Crickard to go ahead and give report for Nursing Facility:**

Roughly 95 Veterans – There are 7 beds being kept open intentionally – we have veterans that are occupying semi-private rooms that would be more appropriately located in private rooms and so we are waiting on private rooms to open, so we can free up some of the double rooms. We have 4 veterans on our specialty unit. All four have alzheimers or dementia related disease. All staff that we intend to be working there are there. We have full attendance 24-7, Recreational assistants, Director that is well trained, plenty of nurses and nursing assistants that staff that unit, and we intend on taking two admissions a week for the next several weeks so that the unit is completely full. We have requested a recognition survey and inspection to license us to technically call it an Alzheimer's Unit. At this time we're calling it a "Specialty Unit" but once we pass this inspection, we can officially call it an Alzheimer's Unit and advertise it as such.

Four hour quality assurance meeting was held yesterday, these are held quarterly now to try and get better and better at what we do.

Question: Does the 95 Veterans include the 4 Alzheimer's?

Dr. Crickard's Response: Yes – 95 is total number in house right now.

Question: You were looking into making contact with local nursing school and try to get some kind of formal agreement made with them, have you made any progress on this?

Dr. Crickard's Response: Limited progress, for example, we have become a training sight for Alderson-Broaddus College and their Physician Assistance Program. We've also became a training sight for Fairmont State University, and some of their interns, we've had a dietary supervisor intern spend several weeks with us, so we are opening up to area colleges to become a training center.

Question: How long do you plan to take two a week?

Dr. Crickard's Response: We should get right to between 100 and 105 until we run into that situation of the 7 veterans who are currently occupying the semi-private rooms that it is not appropriate for them to have roommates now. As time passes and veterans move out or are dying in the private rooms, we will be moving some of these gentlemen into the private rooms. Over time we'll get closer and closer to 120. Our average length of stay is 3.6 years per veteran and we don't have a lot of turn over like the typical nursing facilities.

Question raised by Dennis Rayburn, State Commander of AmVets: Is hospital prepared to deal with younger individuals who have reached the capacity to require daily care?

Dr. Crickard's Response: At the Veteran's Home, we do not discriminate as far as Veterans age. We look at medical abilities. We have some Vietnam Veterans with us now. We're going to need to develop a closer relationship with the VA Hospital and the services they offer regarding generational type issues such as Mental Hygiene, Substance Abuse, etc.

Question: Are there any challenges that you are facing that we can help you with? I know we've made progress in other areas.

Dr. Crickard's Response: Director is aware of our current needs. We have made progress and continue to make progress. The greatest support could be in the area of Licensed Nurse wages and staff retention such as tuition forgiveness plans. I have been working with Director Gwinn and I am encouraged by his acceptance of these ideas and we are working on these ideas at this time.

Question: What is the capacity allowed?

Dr. Crickard's Response: Ability to have 120 veterans in house.

Question: Has anyone made any progress with state to bring nurses wages up to equivalent wages of area hospitals?

Dr. Crickard's Response: There was progress made about 3 months ago Board of Personnel approved through recommendation from Governor Tomblin – Increases for Nurse I & II . Salaries went for Registered Nurses went to \$35,000 from \$29,000. I'm working very closely with the Director on this issue and have made my recommendations. Director Gwinn then added comment: The Board did approve increasing the hiring rate for entry level for those starting out new without experience. We've also been allowed to start wage exceptions. We will be hiring at a higher salary for those with more experience. We've been going through the transition and until July 1<sup>st</sup>, we've been held up, but next week we will be able to submit these wage exceptions and start hiring more experienced nurses.

Question: How will this compare with area hospitals?

Response: This will compare with area hospitals at the State level but not at the Federal level.

Chairman Epling asked if any further questions and when no questions were raised, he thanked Director for report.

- **Chairman Epling requested a report on:  
Lottery Ticket Sales from Director Gwinn:**

Director Gwinn: I passed out a statement about the sales of the lottery tickets and in 2006 we drew in \$876,000, increased in 2007, decreased in 2008, it went back up in 2009 - \$818, 000, and during the recession 2010 it went down to 419,000 – End of May this year or around May 20<sup>th</sup> , we had \$663,000.00 in sales. The Commissioner of Lottery predicted around \$730,000 for end of year total. – So we're right where we need to be. I did pass out new tickets for each of you.

Chairman: Any questions on the Lottery tickets? – No response.

Ok, we'll move on to the:

- **Director's Reports:**

Director Gwinn: Just submitted change order for Cemetery, we're putting Cemetery signs on highway at main entrance. This has been approved and we can start construction of those. I make motion that we have next meeting at the Cemetery at Institute, the buildings are up – They will have them finished by then and we can have our meeting there. Chairman added that we will set this up when we know date of next meeting.

For those who do not know, the Governor appointed me as the new Secretary for the new Department of Veterans Assistance effective July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Applause

**Clarksburg Interstate signs:** Regarding contacting with Dept. of Highways for increasing the size of the signs. I talked to Dept. of Transportation Secretary and he indicated the 18" x 12" current signs will be replaced and made the standard 5' x 18" signs. They were supposed to be contacting Dr. Crickard to see where he wanted the signs.

**Van Driver's Program:** We had a budget issue about two months, normally we pay out \$50,000 dollars a month – this program pays \$75 per day per diem for driver's to transport veterans. These last three months, it's gone up to \$78,000 that we've paid out. We had to do a change in our budget to transfer money to cover this fund, because it was about a \$120,000 short. We completed this transfer to cover the program and we have enough money to pay for that, the Governor is aware of this and we will be asking for a supplemental to cover that for Fiscal Year 2012.

Chairman Epling: What is the reason for the big increase in last three months?

Director Gwinn: More veterans are calling and requesting & requiring transportation, due to price of gasoline going up and the economy.

There will be a point when we max out because we only have a certain number of vans and can only have a certain number of drivers and so this should max out at some point. – This completes Director's report.

Chairman Epling: Any questions?

Concern raised by Jack Tincher: The signage issue you have in Clarksburg, we also have at CBOC in Lewisburg – We need signs.

Director Gwinn stated he will take care of this.

- **Chairman Epling requests report from: Veterans Home**

Veterans Home Administrator, Stacy Brown, is on active duty so Director Gwinn gave report:

Stacy is in Texas right now on active duty.

Report: 110 residents at Veterans Home and everything's running fine.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

**Veterans Inc. Proposal:** Director Gwinn addresses:

This was passed on by the Governor to the Secretary of DMAPs and his recommendation to the Governor was for the Council to review his plan, his plan was a billion dollar plan to create his own Dept. of Veteran's Assistance becoming Ultima Veterans. I have made comments in the report here.

Council Member added: He is notorious for great schemes that never happened, he's done several things like this. **Motion made, seconded, voted on and passed that Council rejects the proposal.**

**Chester Fleming: Letter of resignation** was submitted by me back in February, due to failing health issues. Effective with the appointment of my replacement, Letter was read by Mr. Fleming. The name I submit as consideration for my replacement is Mr. James DeCarlo, Korean War Veteran. – Mr. DeCarlo stood up to be recognized. Applause.

Chairman Epling: Chester, on behalf of the Council, we want to thank you for your four years of the Veterans Council and I'm sure every member of the Council wish you well in your endeavors and thank you for your service. Applause.

Chairman Epling asks if there are any further names to place into nomination to submit to Governor as replacement? No further names were submitted.

Chairman added: **This name- James DeCarlo will be submitted to Governor for consideration as replacement.**

**Patrick Farrell introduced Kevin Brady, Executive Director of Greater Huntington Parks & Recreation District, who wants to discuss a proposal about a 9/11 Memorial that will be taking place in Huntington in September.**

Mr. Brady: Thank you for having me here this afternoon. I'm honored to be here. The GHPRD has been designated as a leader in this presentation. City of Huntington WV will be first city in WV to host what is called the **Healing Field**. Our goal ultimately is to place 3,000 3'x5' American Flags on display on 8' poles at the Springhill Cemetery. Our ceremony memorial services begin on September 3<sup>rd</sup> for seven days, with around 400 volunteers, boy scouts, girl scouts, ROTC students helping us get things set up. That Sunday we will have a media day, hosting Regional, Local, and National Media. – Monday is Labor Day and we hope to have an opening ceremony with Michael Douglas Smith. Our ultimate goal is to build a bell tower that will sit next to the grave of Dr. Paul Ambrose who died in American Airlines Flight 77 that crashed at the Pentagon on September 11. He was a Huntington resident and a Doctor concerned with pain and health issues. This bell tower will be to honor veterans, victims, and the victims of Marshall Memorial Plane Crash. Eight Day memorial service and we need support in leadership, coordinators, etc. – If you can imagine the power of 3,000 American flags on display as you walk up to the Springhill Cemetery, it's quite spectacular. This is a fundraiser and all dollars will go to the Foundation of the Tri-State Community to go toward the construction of the bell tower. It will be all week long and the final day will be a day of silence to walk among the healing flags.

Request made to encourage all state directors of various VSO's to get local, if not statewide veterans involved in this to contact Mr. Brady to do what they can.

Jack Tincher is requesting a copy of the handouts to disburse and share with all veterans groups and veterans of state.

Meg Cianfrocca from Senator Rockefeller's Office: VA budget is not on the table and is not an issue at the moment.

Chairman Epling: Thank you Meg.

Michael Dawson asked if there's any progress going on with the Nursing Home in Beckley.

Meg responds: Improvement in last year's budget in the Omnibus. When the Omnibus bill was not voted on, anything in that bill dies, and as a result of it not being passed in the Omnibus bill, Senator Rockefeller wrote a letter to Secretary Shinseki and asked that this be included in the budget. We have not got a result back from that. We are still working on it.

Michael Dawson comments about the van program: I'm a driver and a coordinator, every day the list of veterans needing transportation gets longer, the vans are getting old, some of the guys drive 30 or 40 miles each way just to pick up the vans. The money is not getting wasted.

Director Gwinn added that we fully support the program but just wanted to make you aware of the budget issue. We have several new vans scheduled for delivery in July.

Question raised: The veterans you're taking down, are they the same guys that could be making all appointments in the same day?

Mr. Dawson responds: We try our best to work with the hospital and try to get all appointments in one day if we can, but that's not always possible.

Dennis Rayburn expresses to the Council and all the individuals present that he believes the bill that passed this past spring by the Legislature creating the Department is one of the best things that has happened to the State of West Virginia and the people that are sitting in this room are the primary individuals who contributed to that – He added, "I want to thank everyone for their help and their support."

Chairman Epling: Thank you Dennis.

Jack Tincher: I wanted to thank the young man who's with us today who's doing a great job for Veterans and I want everyone to give applause. Applause.

Dept. of Administration - Introduction of Intern Allison Pullen, who's going into Airforce in a couple of years, goes to Ohio State. – Applause.

Rick Given: Thanks to everyone present at meeting.

**Woody Williams:** Thank everyone for being here.

Woody raised question about the minutes-Can they be sent to these folks attending these meetings?

Response by Chairman: Yes, as long as you sign the sheet.

Woody continued:

It's thrilling that Keith was appointed to that position and we congratulate Keith and we congratulate the Governor for doing it.

Is there any way that we could get a microphone so that we could all hear what is being said and so that the people who are speaking could have a microphone to speak into so that we could all have a clear set of minutes? I would like to propose that we work on that.

Chairman Epling: We'll work on that.

Woody continued: I have a list of the representatives of the major Veterans organizations here. If we ever decide to contact the Council about something, who do we call?

Chapter 9A, Section 3, This council is charged with among other functions "And to advise the Governor, and the Legislature with Respect to Legislation affecting the interests of veterans, their widows, dependents and orphans" – proposal is that the Council appoints a representative from the Council as their Legislative Officer, so that if I want to call and discuss something, I can call that person and that person can discuss with the Council.

Suggestion by Council Member: We should take Mr. Williams recommendation and talk about it and at the next Council meeting, we'll come back to him with a response of how we can most effectively hear the Veteran constituents in the State to get the information to the Council and I think it's a good proposal that we need to discuss more of the details of how it would work.

Woody Williams: The second thing I want to bring up is that we have three Veteran's Institutions in the State: Veterans Home, Cemetery, and the Nursing Home – Eligibility for those places should be exactly the same for all veterans and at this point in time, as far as I know, we do not have a standardized absolute eligibility requirement listing.

Director Gwinn: Dr. Crickard changed the eligibility requirements about 6 months ago and it's the same as the Barboursville Veteran's Home. The Cemetery has not been established yet because we're still setting those. That will be at next meeting when we set the guidelines. With the State Cemetery, we do not have to go completely by the National requirements, we can consider Guard and other members and so at the next meeting, that will be an issue for discussion, eligibility requirements for the Cemetery.

Woody Williams: How will we get this information out to the people who may be interested in applying? Just having the information in-house doesn't do a whole lot of good.

Director Gwinn: Eligibility requirements are on the website.

Woody Williams: My concern is that I see this information in writing. Everyone doesn't use the website. – We should all be on the same page when it comes to the eligibility for our veterans.

Woody continues: The Veterans Council basically is the organization who we're going to look to you to handle legislation that we might want to go to the legislature. So if I come up with a resolution, rather than sending to all the representatives which I have been doing (well a great number of representatives in the legislature– 20 or 25 copies, I'm going to send it to you, you then will be the responsible people to take it to the Legislature or tell me who we need to go to. There has to be some form of communication back and forth between the



Veterans and this Council. This Council has never been "that type" of a Council. Would you admit that?

Chairman Epling: "Woody, I have been on this Council for over 20 years and you said today that you are glad to see this many people here and I agree with you and wish this room was completely full. I've been on this Council at a lot of meetings when there was not a soul in this room....not a soul. It's just been in the last few years that people started coming. We can only tell people what we're doing, we can't make them come out here and we'll do everything we can for every Veteran we can in the State of West Virginia, I promise you that."

Woody: I originally thought the Council was a select group and nobody knew that they could come to the Council meetings, I didn't know that I could come.

Chairman Epling: These meetings have always been open to the public and anyone who wanted to walk through this door was welcome.

Chester Fleming: I'm leaving and I've only been here 4 years. This is an advisory body. It would not be appropriate in my understanding for us to present Legislation. It would be for you to present it to the Veterans Organizations to present it to the Legislature and we would advise them whether or not – that's the way I read the State Code. Not to act as a lobbyist or anything else, but to advise them when they get Legislation proposed that that's good legislation or that's bad legislation and we recommend or otherwise both the Legislature and the Governor.

Woody: Is this the understanding of the Council. That's why I bring it up.

Response: This is an advisory group.

Woody asks: Advisory group to whom and for what?

Response: To the Governor and our Legislature

Mr. Fleming has accurately pointed out what the WV code says is our role and responsibility. We are all aware that veteran's organizations throughout the state play a crucial role in achieving the benefits that all veterans are owed. The way to do that, as with any legislative process is to engage with your local politicians. We are here and all of us are members of those same veterans organizations – go to the meetings, listen to the people, talk with the veterans as often as we can - and support any cause that we feel is as important as anyone else, but we do not restrict the rights of the VFW, American Legion, AmVets, or Disabled Vets or anyone else from doing what they feel is in the best interest of the Veterans.

Woody Williams: May I stop you there? How can you advise if you don't know that the legislation is even there? Is it up to the Governor to call you and ask for your advice or is it up to us to give you information that you would advise the Governor on? I'm confused- I don't know which way to go here?

I would say that you should look at the National Model that any lobbying group can contact any legislature or any government body and ask to make a presentation. Alright, like when you want to go to Washington to do something, the VFW, meaning you.

Woody Williams: Are you considering us a lobbying group?

I would say that lobby is certainly a role that VFW and American Legion play, yes.

Woody Williams: I resent that. How can you be a lobbyist if.....

Response from Council Member: I'm not calling you a lobbyist, but I'm saying that the VFW lobbies.

The Council being appointed by the Governor, makes recommendations to the Governor. The Coalition that exists in this state considers legislation, works on legislation through the legislative process. We have a way of doing the legislation. The Council is not in it. The Council is a political appointee who represents the veterans through the Government. Now if it gets down to representing veterans with the Legislature, I'll have to go back and read the charter, I'm not sure that it says anything other than through the Governor. We have a process for doing Legislation.

Chairman Epling: My understanding was that if the Legion had a resolution that they want to present, I can present it with our people and hand it to the Coalition and say, hey, you guys help us, and the VFW help us, and the DAV help us...and we've done it for years that way.

Council Member: To bring this to a close, Mr. Williams, what I would suggest is when any veteran's organization, or any citizen, or any veteran wants to bring something to the Council's attention, they should come to these meetings, ask to be on the agenda, present whatever it is that they want to present, for instance, the VFW would like to propose this legislation, would like your support when it gets introduced, and then we can consider it and go to them and say yes, we support the VFW, or the Coalition, or whoever.....and the Coalition is the best place to start., and then that brings everyone's interest together and the idea that Don Young has always talked about "to speak with one voice" and then if the Coalition presents to us the legislation, and we agree, when the Governor asks us if what do you think? We'd say, heck yeah...they came to us, they talked to us about it and we agree.

Director Gwinn: This year when the legislation came in session, we tracked all of these bills and emailed these out to the Council Members. We will continue doing this every year. Angela sends out the email to everyone who she can get the email address for.

Mr. Latimer: As President of the AFA, and member of the Korean War Veterans, I just want to thank you for listening to the introduction of our Chapter President, Jim DeCarlo.

Mr. DeCarlo: Thank you for your recommendation Chester, I'll do my best to do a fine job to the best of my ability. Thank you very much.

Secretary of DMAPS, Joe Thornton: I just wanted to come by and tell you that as you guys transition into your own Department, it was wonderful to work with you and for you and if there's anything the Department of Military Affairs & Public Safety can do to continue to help Veterans Assistance as it grows up and moves out of my house, I pledge that support. I have nothing but the deepest respect and want to help you and serve you. Applause

Deborah Tompkins, Council Member – I just want to thank everyone for coming out today and I would like to see the room this full every time. It does give sometimes heated, but lively discussion to where we are speaking with one voice. We're different generations but we're all veterans.

Ralph Stump, Council Member: I want to say thanks to all these people who showed up today that are interested in the Veterans and the veterans work.

Mr. Harris, Council Member: When you get to be our age, and Woody's age, our days are getting numbered, but getting back to the point, we are a receiving body here to listen to all the complaints and suggestions that come out of the veterans organizations and then they are transmitted through channels to get to the Governor.

Introduction made of James Talerico, new Senior Vice- Commander of the VFW, Dept. of West Virginia.

Chester Fleming, Council Member: I would like to thank the Council for serving with you. He then asks Cedric, have you got anything else to report on the doors at DMV?

Cedric Greene, Council Member: Email from DMV about a month or so ago and the bottom line was that the landlord who owns that building says he doesn't have the money to put in automatic doors at that facility. For those who don't know what we're talking about, they have the DMV to the point that you can't get into it with a wheelchair. I've been beating at it for about 2 1/2 years and now that I'm no longer on the Council and won't embarrass the Council or the Governor, you may see me over there with my wheelchair and a sign that says the State and the Mall is unfair to disabled people.

Randall Bare, Council Member: I want to talk about Veteran's issues in the State. Our job is to recommend to the Governor our thought on legislation. We need to know the impact the legislation will have in the community. I want to recognize Jim at the extension Veterans in Huntington last weekend, he raised over \$11,000 for Wounded Warrior project. Half went to the program for

bringing wounded veterans to West Virginia for fishing and white tail hunting, turkey hunting, whatever it may be. The other half went to the national service program – Veterans and their families, Iraq and Afghanistan, many are destitute and can't put food on the table. If you want to do something for Veterans, go back to your communities and find ways to reach out and help the veterans. We've got to come up with a solution – the State needs to be more involved in helping these Veterans. We've got guys committing suicide because they're living out there and need help. Those guys and gals cannot continue to live the way that they have. We've got some serious issues out there, get involved in the community, get hold of someone and let those veterans know to get ahold of VFW, American Legion, etc. We need to come up with something long-term to care for these Veterans.

Meg Cianfrocca of Senator Rockefeller's Office: Ordinary claims are taking a backseat to Nehmer claims, so if you have a Veteran in a situation that they are in a financial hardship and they have a claim pending, and if there's ever a situation similar to what's been brought up today, please direct to me or a service officer in the VA.

Bob Vass, Council Member: I share Bill and Ralph's thoughts in that this good group of people out here is a great group supporting the Veterans.

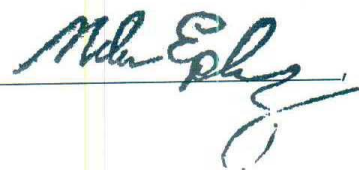
Director Gwinn makes recommendation that we have next meeting at the Cemetery. Date and time to be determined.

Chairman Epling: Thanks to everyone for coming and we hope that in some way we helped and did some good for the Veterans in West Virginia, that's our goal and we will continue to do that.

Meeting Adjourned.

Minutes approved by Veterans Council Chairman, \_\_\_\_\_

the 24<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2011.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Epling", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.